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sports state, Big Sky

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UM WRESTLING OUTLOOK

by
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UM Sports Information Director

With 14 returning lettermen back, University of Montana wrestling coach John Jerrim has an optimistic attitude as the 1978-79 mat season rapidly approaches.

"I really feel that with the people we have, judging from what they've done in the past and lacking injury we'd have to be considered for the Big Sky championship," Jerrim said. "Time will tell. That's been our goal for the past couple of years. I thought we would be right there last year, and we weren't that far away."

Jerrim has been putting his grapplers through their paces for more than two weeks now, and sees an improving, young group which could indeed be a contender for conference honors.

"The big question right now is in our lower weights," Jerrim said. "We lost our 118, 126 and 134-pounders, so you can see we'll need help at those spots. We do have some promising people, though."

Jerrim, who begins his fourth year as Grizzly head coach, said he is happy with the younger team members. "I am very happy with the newcomers," he said, as he studied the wrestling roster last week. "They are enthusiastic, and all good students. It's some of the best group of kids we've had since I've been here."

UM was fourth in the Big Sky Championships last season with 49 points. Boise State won its fourth straight conference crown with 80½ points. Idaho State was second (70¼) and host Weber State third with 60½ points.

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The Grizzlies had only one titlist, Lamont Roth, who won the 158-pound class as a freshman. UM's Otis Price was a runnerup in the 134-pound class.

In the consolation bracket, Grizzlies Jim Clowes (167) and Scott Morton (190) were winners. Glenn Nelson (118), Gary Murphy (142), Neal Nix (150) and Mike Pontzlaff (HWT) were winners. Clowes, Morton, Nix and Pontzlaff are all returning.

The Grizzly wrestlers will begin their 1978-79 schedule Saturday, Nov. 11 at Coeur D'Alene for a tournament. Their first conference matchup is Nov. 30, as they host Weber State. The meet begins at 1 p.m.

A breakdown by weight classes:

118--DAN BOUCHER, a junior with two years experience, was 4-8 last year, and has won two letters. Freshman DOUG FORREST, who was the winner of the All-Service Greco-Roman and Freestyle matchups while in the Navy, will push BOUCHER for a starting spot.

126--Two freshmen, JOHN CARVER and WADE ROMANS will be vying for the start here. Both have impressive credentials. CARVER, from Bordentown, New Jersey, was 40-6 his last two seasons and was third in the State. From Fairbanks, Alaska, ROMANS placed in the State all four years and was 84-5 with 57 wins coming via a pin. He won the State title twice.

134--A one-year letterman, junior JIM BRUBAKER has the inside track in this division. He led U of M team in reversals last season.

142--Junior BRAD BENN is another outstanding junior college man from N. Idaho JC, one of the top teams in the country for the past few years. As a prep Ben was 120-20 and placed in the State meet (Washington) three times. BENN lost in overtime in the Regionals last year, although his JC team won the national title. BENN should be a contender for Big Sky honors.

150--Also from N. Idaho JC, NEAL NIX was a winner in the consolation section last year in the BSC meet. NIX, who lost to the eventual Big Sky winner last year,

was slowed by an injury last season, and 27-5 two years ago. He was 7-4 last year. "Potentially, and technique-wise, he is probably the best wrestler we've got," Jerrim said of the man from Kenniwick, Washington. He will be another possible winner of a Big Sky title.

158--What can you say about LAMONT ROTH, who was the BSC champion a year ago as a freshman? He was 20-7-1 last season, and defeated the wrestler who had won the 167-pound title a year ago. ROTH, one of several UM grapplers from Bettendorf, Iowa, is a strong candidate for Big Sky honors, and could be a candidate for the league's MVP.

167--Winner of the consolation bracket in this weight class last year, JIM CLOWES is one of several reasons why Jerrim has a smile on his face every time he talks about his upper weight divisions. CLOWES lost by only one point to the eventual Big Sky winner, and has placed in the BSC the last two years. Unfortunately for UM, he is deciding whether or not he will compete this season. He feels as though he should devote more time to his studies.

177--"This is going to be a good weight for us," Jerrim said. DAN HANLEY, a two-year letterman from Bettendorf, is No. 1 right now, but Jerrim said he could drop to the 167-pound class.

190--SCOTT MORTON, who is presently playing (and starting) on the football team at linebacker, went to the nationals last year. His story in last year's BSC meet is an interesting one.

MORTON was leading Harold Wittman of Boise State when the official charged him with an illegal hold. The illegal hold resulted in an injury, and Wittman got the win because the injury was a result of an illegal hold. MORTON went on to take third place with a pin. Since Wittman was unable to continue, the BSC coaches ruled that he could challenge Craig Simpson of Weber State for the right to go to the nationals. MORTON did, and won 14-8. Jerrim said MORTON is thinking of dropping to the 177-pound class.

HWT--Another of the "Bettendorf Connection" wrestlers, MIKE PONTZLAFF, a junior, has already lettered twice at UM. He placed third in the Big Sky last year. Light for a heavyweight (215), PONTZLAFF is also an outstanding boxer and won the Illinois championship.

TOP NEWCOMERS (by weight)

118--MIKE TICE, a freshman from New Mexico, was 98-8 as a prep at the New Mexico Military Institute. TICE was 27-1 last year and second in the State. His only loss was in the finals. Not only did he win 26 straight matches, but he did not get scored on. RICH JIMENEZ, a freshman from Choteau, is another contender.

134--Injured last year, sophomore RICH CURRY from Baker, MT could be back this year. TONY TALARICO from Chicago, a freshman, could be a contender at 126 or 134.

142--From Bettendorf, MIKE STORI was injured last year as a high school senior, but still finished second in the district meet.

150--MEL FLAGET is a first-year man out of Eureka, MT. Last year he was second in the State tournament and fourth the previous year. He was named his high school's top athlete as a junior. MATT POPHAM and JIM AXE, from Hamilton and Billings, respectively, could win a berth here.

158--MIKE LLEWELLYN has one season of experience on the UM varsity. JACK ARMSTRONG from Choteau is a freshman with potential.

167--Frosh JOHN MEAD was fifth in Nebraska last year and 27-3.

177--Sophomore TONY WATKINS (Spokane), and freshmen JOHN WILLER (Eureka) and STEVE WOOD (Moorhead, Minn.) will be vying here.

190--Citadel transfer NEAL FREITAS, a sophomore, could help out here or at 177.

HWT--Another strong weight class, senior DAN SCOW (Great Falls) and freshman MYKE MILLER (Spokane) are both top-notch. SCOW has wrestled varsity before and MILLER was undefeated last season as a prep and the Washington State champ. Football player PAT NORWOOD (Billings) is another candidate.